

Sea Urchin Zone Council Research Subcommittee Meeting March 21, 2013 in Bangor

DMR staff: Trisha De Graaf, Robert Russell, Linda Mercer and Maggie Hunter via phone.

Public: Bill Sutter, Larry Harris, Joe Leask, Paul Cox, Yarann Im, Steve Eddy, Ian Emery, Chuon Muth, Dean Norris, Steve Eddy, Chris Buyers, William Smith, Ed Fagonde,

Meeting commenced at 4:43pm

L. Harris: We have been talking, regarding Whiting & Denny's Bay and not wanting to make that mistake again. We talked about moving urchins, some with success, some not. I have done one, Robert did one, and Cobscook Bay Fishermen's Association did one. If we are going to have some sort of opportunity for these kind of innovative pursuits in the future, what criteria do we need in the FMP? Reseeding sublegals or hatchery animals to reseed ledges. What would fishermen like to see that would allow them to have some protections that would allow them to have some sort of benefit to the effort they put in? Instead of what I or DMR telling you what they think, let's make a list of industry recommendations

I. Emery – are you talking stock enhancement?

L. Harris – or reseeding. In Whiting & Denny's Bay way there were way too many urchins that would never be worth much. Transplanting or thinning then out so that we have a viable resource is an idea. You don't want to do it on a fishing day, but after season or outside of it. But you also want some protections.

I. Emery – Reseeding or stock enhancement, same thing?

L. Harris – Transplanting is one thing, or groups of fishermen using hatchery animals is another.

J. Leask – I don't think it is the same thing. Reseeding hatchery animals is one; moving existing is a different horse. During the season we have done extensive research to find out what works. As people are becoming more aware of it, extremely healthy beds need to have some protection to be sure they are not exceeded. On an open fishing day you can only take legal urchins. You take them a close distance. Hatchery urchins are small, and urchins like that won't survive on the bottom by itself. Hatchery success is reseeding with large urchins already on bottom.

L. Harris – It is the timing of the year, it is possible. But if you guys buy a bunch of urchin from Steve or something, those are yours. Then you go and do experimental leases that will allow you to monitor those animals harvest them.

J. Leask – LPAs?

L. Harris – They are only 400 square meters is not enough. Could be that you buy an aquaculture lease site, and then you have legal redress. But if you are talking about moving legal size urchins out of season, there needs to be some process.

I. Emery – It seems like a lot of circular discussions. You are talking about what has been done. Joe is talking about moving legal urchins. But your question was what are the fishermen's idea of what you want to do in a situation where you can move urchins during the season?

L. Harris – No, right now the season is so short, you want to make money on days that it is open and supply the processor as they need resource. What you are really talking about is I have an idea, what protections would I need? What protections do you think make sense to allow for that effort and reap any rewards next season?

I. Emery – There are enough regulations on book to allow for that.

B. Sutter –The LPA would only allow for a 400m lease.

I. Emery – But there is a bigger one. Is there a process where one can get a permit to move animals?

L. Mercer – We have a special license for our of season, undersized, etc..

I. Emery – So that is already there.

J. Leask – But would DMR allow me to take urchins out here out of season to move to my site?

I. Emery – I have a problem with that as a Zone 2 representative. I have a hard time trying to do that. Talk about a public resource and putting on a private lease.

D. Norris – It is a public resource and I don't think you should do something that results in a handful of winners and a bunch of losers. Some folks are going to get good spots, other not. To succeed, you are allowed to move mixed sizes if someone hits that in one year and hits it, they are not all gone. Privatization, I don't mind if we select an area that could succeed. I don't mind as a fisherman taking a day a year, outside of the season, some of my time to supply urchins to an area that would not be open to regular harvest. I don't mind if it is open to everyone, as long as the same requirements are on them to put in a few hours a few times a year. We all sign up for areas. 3 totes or 15 totes a piece, whatever science supports a limited harvest. I don't mind a few areas along the coast to do that.

I. Emery – I think the Department would need to be involved with oversight.

D. Norris – Everyone in industry would be willing to help, they all want the bottom enhanced.

I. Emery – I know people in my area that would do it.

T. Sawtelle – We did it last year, 14 of us. We leave one drag full and left them in Bar Harbor area in Lubec. We made an agreement was that we wait until Christmas to fish it.

I. Emery – how did it work?

T. Sawtelle– Some folks went early, others that didn't help and then it got harvested.

L. Harris – I am talking about a proof of concept. Whiting & Denny's Bay had three years of sacrifice, without a survey before or after and not the proper regulations to put a number of boats or totes for harvest. So guys that gave up that area would have that opportunity. Not forever – you don't want a bunch of adult urchins in a place and then strip them out after a year. Bring in all sizes, and then those that participate would be allowed to harvest the legals. Reestablish ledges or bottom so that in future those areas come into play.

J. Leask – I don't consider it a failure or a complete success. It shows what urchins can do on their own without intervention. When you reestablish an area with an adult population, you don't take them all. I would like to see areas closed before they are completely stripped.

I. Emery – What is your threshold?

J. Leask – Common sense, you're a diver, you know when to leave.

I. Emery – When do you leave?

J. Leask – When I get a sense about it. Adam Scott has a good sense of Western end of Zone 2. Then Bill Ambrose covers to East and I asked what their stock assessment is. I used to flip boulders, I don't now. Don't take every last urchin.

I. Emery – That is your rule of thumb, when you have to flip boulders, you leave?

J. Leask – I leave beds. I have looked into the LPA and farming them. If Dean had a farm up there and increased the biomass, then more spawn in water column.

L. Harris – If you have really big urchins too big to harvest, they are spawning and providing protection for little ones. Even little ones contribute spawn. If moving urchins, you are reestablishing urchins. If you would transplant a range of sizes, but set a limit on how long the area is protected, set a limit and then open it to everyone. You give at least a reward for the one year to the person who made the effort, then open up to everyone – it will benefit everyone.

B. Sutter – How big of an area you talking in Bar Harbor Lubec?

T. Sawtelle – 150-200 acres. 80% small, 20% keepers, why we kept them on table. 50-60 boxes per boat. 600 totes. They got good. But when we put them in there, earlier in the year. We were supposed to wait a full year, but by Christmas, people started fishing them. All sizes. Spines look completely different, using small spines in that area.

P. Cox – Look at Cobcook. After three years [of closure], it was pretty good.

T. Sawtelle – That was fished harder the 8 days it was open rather than previous five years. It was because it was so public. We fished the same exact spots. We moved from Dram Island cause they were thick and not very good.

P. Cox - I wouldn't talk about Cobcook being a failure. More dollars that came out of there for 8 urchin days than for scallops that came the whole season. We need some late days – early, medium and late. When we did the survey last year in late march, they were plugged full of roe.

T. Sawtelle – A couple of days in the early season then on the late and could in the overlap.

I. Emery – What are we trying to do here with this?

L. Harris - These are things that need to be done that would allow this to happen.

P. Cox – It can't be public knowledge.

R. Russell – We can't do that.

P. Cox – Just give us a permit.

L. Mercer – We can't do that.

L. Harris – One fishermen or a group out of season, you are going to have to have it laid out what you are going to do and document it. You can take a small camera down with a dive knife and a quadrat and do a very quick and dirty population study. Then you have the before info and where you put them down.

R. Russell – Mechanism, how it could be possible. The special license process, I need to get them myself for survey. They are granted to violate certain rules for public gain. Special license can do that. Want to move to a system where closed to the public, to protect for people who participate, that is different and can't do that with Special License. Set aside for private gain, can't do that.

L. Mercer – The Commissioner can close and open areas, but there is no mechanism to open for only private.

D. Norris – Zone council money should go to support this research.

T. De Graaf – the current urchin research surcharge fund is decreasing annually by \$10,000. It is not sustainable.

L. Harris – There may be a small amount of money to survey.

T. Sawtelle – If bettering yourself should have to be able to put your time in.

I. Emery – I am willing to volunteer time.

L. Harris – If volunteered and paid off it would support. People that are most experience will put thought into it and will benefit to their effort for one year, and then reverts back to the public.

J. Leask – So back to the fund, it is tanking?

R. Russell – Yes, we lose \$10,000 each year due to less license revenues coming in, etc.

B. Sutter– There are places East of Pen Bay that you can pick up and move urchins. West of Pen Bay there has been no rebound.

D. Norris – West of Bucksport is dead.

B. Sutter – West of Cobscook dead. But there areas in there that always have urchins. In Zone 1 if you deplete urchins in the only remaining areas, not good. I can envision whole bays that used to have urchins and there are none. Could have been crabs, who knows. You could take that whole bay and augment it. Then whole idea of public resource is whole other idea. We need to have it in larger numbers for as long as possible to keep these guys in business. Moving urchins around may work for Zone 2, but not Zone 1. But like Larry said, you need to provide protections to the people providing contributions. More you put in that more you take out. If putting them in, it does not become the type of resource we have now, we have sea ranching. You are putting them in, you don't have a lease, doesn't affect what lobster, etc... got to do it in areas that are not producing now, because those that are producing are limited.

I. Emery – The Department has a number of avenues for people that want to get into aquaculture. But you are talking about sea ranching, which is different. How to repopulate bays that are not populated now.

B. Sutter – If all the urchins would die off and you knew the areas where they used to be, you would know where to start. Don't go in and pillage and rape. You would know how much to take out to maintain a viable stock. If urchin industry is going to continue in Maine, we are going to have to have a larger volume and for a more months.

C. Muth – Right now we need at least 6 months and process at least 3 days a week. Right now, 85% of the customers are leaving us.

B, Sutter– If you are going to do a put and take, in areas that are not producing now, then regulations that apply to taking them out should be more based on a market. If you had a bay and knew how many to take out, you could determine how many to take out matched to the market.

D. Norris – We have a season set up based on the market now. You want steady supply.

C. Muth – the market wants to always have your product on the shelf. This year we couldn't do that because price was flexible and they went looking to Russian and Mexico instead.

D. Norris – Before the 3 days per week gave us a steady supply. 36 days did not give you that.

B. Sutter – green week paid too much.

C. Muth – Right now 85% of the market are rejecting our product because we paying too much.

B. Sutter – What I am getting at, we need to increase the amount, we need to produce, then the value of each unit is less. There is no reason where you have a bay that is not producing now and bring it back and then there is no reason that you can't market those urchins ahead of time.

C. Muth – We have a supermarket direct market – they are paying a high price. Auction – everyone can go there, but it is risky. Now the supermarkets are shifting x amount of boxes from us and shift to Russian Hokkaido. Russian took 60-70% of market that we used to sell. To get that back we need to sell at 100 yen lower than Hokkaido to get that market back.

B. Sutter – you tell us what you need, and others processors as well.

C. Muth – I supply one more processor, Machun. He can only ship 30 boxes once a week. Without me, he would shut down. Dewey buys for him and I supply him. He will have a hard time. To get those markets back we have to sell cheaper and be consistent. We cannot overfish and not oversupply the market. Machun would need 50 boxes of finished product, which is 200 totes a week, to get market the back and the quality needs to be perfect to compete with domestic processors.

J. Leask – Our quality has been what has carried us all along.

D. Norris – and our skilled workers.

C. Muth – the processors quality as well.

B. Sutter – I want to know what we have to be producing [to keep you in business].

C. Muth – I can live with 500 totes a week, and there are 5 more processors [who would need the same].

B. Sutter – So, you need a couple of thousand totes a week?

J. Leask – How many did you process this week?

C. Muth – 120 totes.

J. Leask – and what about when Canada opens?

C. Muth – There are have only been three boats for the last couple of years.

I. Emery – You are not going to put a bunch of hatchery urchins out there unless you have some confidence that they are going to survive.

C. Muth - If you move the urchins that never get good to better areas, they will get good.

J. Leask – You need to be careful as those urchins still contribute to the biomass.

C. Muth – If you put an urchin in a truck from Ellsworth to Rockland, they will die. If you have in waters and don't crush them and moving to close by, then they will live. Needs to be close by.

B. Sutter – Now back to Zone 1. What I was saying is that we are not going to take urchins from the last remaining places where they are and move them because they will die.

D. Norris – If I hit a junk bed hard, then I need to survey it first. You can nail a junk bed pretty good, next year the same biomass will be there. Just the size distribution changes, as the babies will grow as they were limited by their food availability. There are opportunities to use the junk beds to augment the resource. I have seen the distribution change. We have seen areas where you can stick your arm through a bed so thick.

J. Leask – Years ago we said that and you worked the junk line and that was all that was good. Now we are talking about moving in the opposite direction. Need to be cautious with existing beds, only move adults. Now there are juveniles there now, as beds are extremely healthy.

B. Sutter – The other part of the conversation is that each section of the coast has a different needs as it is unique.

R. Russell – I have a question. The larval plates we have done for years show that we are not larval limited. Collectors have not shown big decline, they are coming from somewhere - Canada or Downeast, but they don't survive. Out planting in cages in Chile survive very well. If you did out planting, Steve, is there a certain size you need to get them to so they have better survival, or is it better to take the thumbnail stuff in coves?

Steve – There hasn't been enough work done. In Japan there is varying success, less than 20% to 60%. It is about the bottom and the feed. Bottom is different. Location location.

R. Russell – We used to have the good larval supply up until a year ago.

L. Harris – There are a couple of places at the Isle of Shoals that have more than one year class, but they don't have the crabs.

R. Russell – So, do we ramp up production of thumbnail urchins and dump them or do something different?

B. Sutter – Take a place with little to no fishing occurring, and you put a lot of effort into creating overtime something that will produce and then you see the fleet coming over the horizon - it won't work. The management measures we have in place over past 20 years have not worked.

I. Emery – I have a different view as number the people participating in this fishery is smaller. Possibility to have a meeting with the industry participants and get more involvement in some type of planning. If you create an exclusive plan, it will run into a road block. You are better off getting an industry wide endorsement, or what Dean spoke about with criteria, to help. If you come into my area and shut it off to me, I will have a problem with that.

B. Sutter – Should we remove the zones then?

T. Sawtelle – I think the lobster zones would be fine.

B. Sutter – They are different sizes. What I am getting at, you are going to have the people working on the resource, there has to be controls on who can harvest that once it comes back.

I. Emery – You are going to get all the folks going to most productive areas then.

J. Leask – That is what we are doing now, we will wipe it out.

D. Norris – We did that with the zones we have now. I think it should be a large area, so there is no incentive for poaching. Little exclusive zones will require a lot of resource to put buoys to mark.

T. Sawtelle – You can't build a garden in your backyard and have whole town come harvest it.

S. Eddy – Too large of an area is difficult to reseed though, need discrete areas.

D. Norris – Petit Manan is what I am talking about. Used to be so productive, now there is nothing.

B. Sutter – If we want to increase the productivity along the coast of Maine we need to do something to increase the biomass.

D. Norris – Ridge Rocks used to be a historical productive. 20-30 guys should work it and gain if they put time in.

I. Emery - I think there needs to be a plan to participate where everyone has the opportunity to participate, and sign up for plan. I know guys who come up and fish our areas and I put up with it.

J. Leask – Zone 1 guys used to fish our end and vice versa.

I. Emery - My point is that if this area is being brought back that they have a right.

B. Sutter– what are the lobster zone. Line goes to...

C. Buyers – Lubec to Schoodic Point.

I. Emery - Everyone will come up to my zone cause that where the eggs are.

C. Buyers – They took a fair amount of urchins out of Jonesport and Frenchman's Bay this year.

B. Sutter – Won't you need some sort of governance charter over that area? Take your municipal clam ordinance – it has a conservation requirement to harvest. Put effort, time and money into it and you get to harvest.

R. Russell – A large aquaculture site managed by a coop?

C. Muth – Yes.

B. Sutter – If going to have a governance charter, you have a management group of people who live there and they say next Wednesday you have conservation time – be there or be square.

C. Buyers – What are you talking about, reseeding and relocating?

I. Emery – [brings C. Buyers up to speed as he just arrived.....]

J. Leask– Larry wanted ideas of what they want to do.

W. Smith– Are talking about privatizing a public resource?

B. Sutter – no.

T. Sawtelle – You get to opt in.

S. Eddy – The resource is already privatized, I can harvest.

W. Smith– This is what has happened to other fisheries. If you can't be mobile, you can't stay in business.

B. Sutter – The fact of life is that we don't have enough urchins and resource has gone down.

D. Norris – You can't say that, it has stabilized over last 5 years since it went to 45 days. We had a glitch last year due to process. Most of the hurt right now is 30 [36] days. We need Canada.

B. Sutter– Zone 1 has mandatory reporting now. Last year they landed 200,000lbs, so rest came out of Zone 2. There are so few active harvesters left.

C. Muth – The early season in Zone 1 - they had twice as many urchins this year as before.

B. Sutter – The divers didn't increase, but because of scallop season, lobstermen decided to go scalloping and went urchin fishing as well as they rug over to drag.

J. Leask – What happened is guys who are left got the word of where the urchins were and found the urchins. Atchan turned away 140 totes of urchins one day because the quality was not good. What Bill said is there were a few more harvesters. There used to be urchins on every piece of bottom on coast of Maine, we have some of the best bottom worldwide. I don't mind taking a roll of the dice and putting urchins on the bottom. I think we can be successful to put these things on bottom and see what they can do. Get eggs on bottom, had a project in Whiting & Denny's Bay that can be successful. Conservation idea is terrific idea.

I. Emery – The Department already can do conservation areas.

J. Leask – But the rules need to be loosened up. I am cautious about moving biomass. Like Killer said, it is a public resource. I am not 100% on board, I like what you are doing Steve, it increases biomass, but urchins have not been in the wild for all that long. You need to take an urchin and keep it in an area.

S. Eddy – That is what Japan does, they take urchins from an area that they are going to go back to that area.

D. Norris – On the issue of someone taking the work that someone else has put in. If everyone was required to move mixed sizes, then it works. I could find his and he could find mind. The week the season ends when the water is still cold. Spend one or two days that we are not selling.

B. Sutter – As long as you have urchins to move.

D. Norris – You have a different deal. What do you see for just Zone 1?

Bill – how many urchins were harvested in York county?

Dena – one guy I know of, he said he had one spot he could retire off of.

B. Sutter - I am afraid if we can't come to some agreement, you can be mobile all you want but you won't have anyone to sell to.

C. Buyers – why?

C. Muth – We have problems with the markets right now. We want 3 days a week, X amount of boxes for each buyer and we need to be competitive with Russia.

C. Buyers – These prices are crazy. Have you been able to pay \$7 and make money?

C. Muth – No, the cost will be \$8-9 to buyer and process. Pay \$4.50 if pack out at 13% is only way, can only buy really good urchins to pack out. We have to sell for \$9 and Japan won't agree. If they do agree, they will have to buy minimal amount. We have to look at other rates. Most of year we have been selling to domestic market and they just want a minimal amount. None of us will survive with overseas markets. We need more days and a little more urchins. 50-60% from Maine and the rest is from somewhere else.

B. Sutter – If you had a choice, where you would buy?

C. Muth – Canada is not consistent, pay more to truck, except Tadousac [Québec] for one month is the best urchins – big volume for one month.

J. Leask - Been fishing areas for 20 years. We need to close areas then reopen areas.

Adjourned at 6:10pm.